REMARKS

Reconsideration of this application, as amended, is respectfully requested. The claims as amended are supported in the specification. For example, the creation and use of the "ranked access levels" recited in claim 148 is described in the specification at paragraphs [0064]-[0069]. New claims 176 - 178 are supported by the specification as originally filed, for example at paragraphs [0070] - [0073]. Accordingly, no new matter is added.

Interview Summary

On May 31, 2006, an interview took place between Examiners Chea and Vaughn, the inventor, Duncan Work and the undersigned attorney of record (who participated by telephone). During the interview certain proposed amendments to claim 148 (relating to hierarchical access levels) and the distinction between a connection threshold and connection strength were discussed. No agreement as to patentability was reached.

1.   **Claim 148 is not anticipated by Robertson et al., because Robertson fails to describe access control criteria that define ranked access levels for one or more users and their contacts.**

As amended, claim 148 is patentable over Robertson. Robertson describes a system that uses dichotomous permission types (e.g., friend-of-friend or not) to grant or not grant an individual access to information. Such permission types are substantially different from the ranked access levels recited in the present claims.

Robertson's access control mechanism is based on "permission types" which can have only one non-null value and which refer only to the types of data that a user is permitted to see. For example, at paragraph 49 Robertson describes a "Permission Type Table" that contains one record for each permission type.[1] Each of these permission types is related to data types the user is permitted to see: crossing paths information; personal information; work information; birthday information, and friend of friend information. Alternatively, Robertson indicates the Permission Type Table could be structured to "allow members to grant and deny access to information on a field by field basis." Nevertheless, such permission types would refer only to the data that another user would be permitted to see, and such

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[1] Note that in paragraph 49, Robertson also uses the term "permission levels", to be synonymous with "permission type". Figures 6 and 9 illustrate this point. Figure 9 shows that a permission type is designated as "on" or "off", with no provision for ranked gradations or levels.

permission could only be granted or denied. In short, there is no consideration or other accommodation whatsoever for ranked access levels as presently claimed.

To further illustrate this point, consider the permission scheme described by Robertson. In this system, an individual designated a "Friend of a Friend" by an intermediary is able to obtain information about a contact of that intermediary that another individual without that permission type would not be able to receive. This is of course provided that the target contact has likewise granted the intermediary "Friend of Friend" permission. Such permissions can extend to further degrees of separation between the searcher and the target. Robertson at ¶¶. 104 - 106.

In contrast, the present claims recite ranked access levels. That is, more than a permission or not form of access control is provided. Ranked access levels provide for a richness not contemplated by or possible using binary permission schemes such as those described by Robertson. Consequently, claim 148 is patentable over Robertson.

2.   Claim 148 is further patentable over Robertson et al., because Robertson fails to describe permission types that refer to attributes of relationships.

Robertson's permission types refer directly to types of data a user is permitted to view. That is, each user decides directly which information to reveal to others. In contrast, claim 148, as amended, recites a method in which the access levels are defined in terms of attributes of relationships that exist between any two persons in each chain of person-to-person relationships. This is an important distinction.

In Robertson's scheme, a user is required to determine, on an individual-by-individual basis, what permissions to set. This can be a labor intensive process. Systems configured in accordance with the present invention, however, allow for automating the assignment of access levels because such levels are defined in terms of attributes of relationships. Some of the new dependent claims introduced above specifically recite the automation of assignment of access levels made possible by defining the access levels in terms of attributes of relationships rather than just individual data.

3.   Claims 148 and 172, and their respective dependent claims are patentable over Robertson in view of Kautz, because neither reference, whether considered alone or in combination, teaches or suggests the claimed invention.

Claim 148 is further patentable over the combination of Robertson and Kautz. Kautz is cited for describing what the Office Action refers to as the use of "connection strength". Whether or not this contention is correct (and below we demonstrate that this contention is in fact incorrect), adding such teaching to those of Robertson would not cure the above-cited defect. That is, even if concepts of connection strength were included in the scheme described by Robertson, the fact would remain that Robertson neither teaches nor suggests the use of ranked access levels defined in terms of attributes of relationships, as presently claimed. Hence, claim 148, and by implication all of its dependent claims, are patentable over this combination of references.

Kautz is being interpreted such that "connection strength [defines] how closely linked the searcher is to the target. In this case, asking a colleague what they know about something indicates a high connection strength." Office Action p.3, section 4. Such an interpretation is wrong. The Office Action confuses connection strength with connection threshold.

As was explained during the interview with Examiners Vaughn and Chea, a connection **threshold** provides for a "maximum number" of individuals, or radius, of person-to-person connections. See, e.g., claim 151. Connection strength, on the other hand implicates attributes of a relationship other than mere radius from the searcher. The cited references (Robertson and Kautz) do not provide for a system in which access control is based upon connection **strength**.

Claims 149 and 150 recite the use of connection strength. Hence, this is a separate and independent reason why these claims are patentable over the combination of Robertson and Kautz. Likewise, claim 172 recites the use of connection strength. Hence, claim 172 and its dependent claims, 173-175, are patentable over the combination of Robertson and Kautz.

3.   **Claims 161 and 162 are patentable over Robertson in view of Kautz and Walker, because the combination of the three references fails to describe the third party evaluation feature of the claimed invention.**

In contrast to the statement made in the Office Action, Walker's system for facilitating employment searches is not equivalent to the third party evaluation report presently claimed. For example, Walker's system does not provide an evaluation of a person within the person-to-person chain connecting the searcher to the potential target. Walker's system simply matches the profiles of potential employees to criteria established by employers and then gives the profiles of the potential employees to the employers. There is no third party evaluation of those potential employees, nor is it possible to form a chain of person-to-person relationships in Walker.

Walker describes a method for anonymous communications between employers and potential employees. The "authentication request" described in Walker is a verification of the authorship and origin of information stored in an employee database. This is not equivalent to the presently claimed third party evaluation report because the authentication request does not pertain "to a person forming a person-to-person relationship connecting the searcher and the potential target". Nor is Walker's authentication request "integrated with a personal profile" of a person "forming a person-to-person relationship connecting the searcher and the potential target."

Similarly, Kautz does not teach or suggest a third party evaluation. Instead, Kautz allows the searcher to specify a social radius, but does not describe a third party evaluation report that is "integrated with a personal profile".

For at least these reasons, claims 161 and 162 are patentable over the cited references.

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Respectfully submitted,

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